

<Articles>Possessive Constructions in English and Japanese

著者	Kobukata Yuko
journal or publication title	Tsukuba English Studies
volume	27
page range	45-62
year	2009-03-06
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2241/102435

Possessive Constructions in English and Japanese*

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1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with the definiteness effect in possessive constructions in English and Japanese and some related issues including existential constructions.¹

The definiteness effect is a frequently discussed feature of *there*-constructions (cf. Milsark (1974, 1977) and many others). The effect is a manifestation of the requirement that the noun phrase whose existence is being asserted must be indefinite, as the following sentences show:

- (1) a. There is a candidate for the job.
- b. * There are the candidates for the job.

The sentence in (1b) is ungrammatical because the postverbal NP is definite unlike the acceptable example in (1a), where the logical subject is indefinite.

In addition to the definiteness effect observed in *there*-constructions, the same effect is also found in English possessive constructions, which is illustrated below (cf. Partee (1999)):

- (2) a. John has a sister.
- b. * John has the sisters.

(Partee (1999:1))

In the acceptable example in (2a), the object of *have* is indefinite, while in the unacceptable example in (2b), the definite object *the sisters* is used.

Furthermore, the definiteness effect is also found in constructions with verbs of acquisition such as *get*, *select*, *choose*, and the like (cf. Moltmann (1995), Burton (1995)):

- (3) a. Mary got a boyfriend.
- b. Mary got some boyfriend.
- c. Mary got many boyfriends.
- (4) a. # Mary got that boyfriend.
- b. # Mary got each boyfriend.
- c. # Mary got most boyfriend.

(Burton (1995:143))

Verbs of acquisition have a semantic similarity with verbs of possession in that they imply a concept of possession. While the examples in (3) are perfectly fine, the sentences in (4) are at least odd if not ungrammatical. In the acceptable sentences in (3), the object is indefinite. In contrast, all the examples in (4) are anomalous when the object is definite. Thus, the same effect is observed in constructions with verbs of acquisition.²

The aim of this paper is to describe, first, how English possessive constructions and Japanese possessive constructions are related to each other especially in terms of informational

structure and, then, how the definiteness effect in these constructions is related to the same effect observed in existential constructions such as *there*-constructions.

2. Definiteness Effect in English Possessive Constructions

This section focuses on the definiteness effect observed in English possessive constructions.

2.1. Relational Reading

Consider the following sentences:

- (5) a. Mary has a husband. (relational reading)
b. Mary is married.

In (5a), the verb *have* takes a relational noun *husband* as its object and the object is understood as Mary's own husband. Thus, the persons who are referred to as *Mary* and *a husband* respectively have a marital relation. In this sense, there holds a possessive relation between the subject and object referents. Thus, as shown by a paraphrase in (5b), the possessive construction with *have* in (5a) expresses a property of the subject referent. We will call this kind of interpretation a "relational reading." It should be noted here that the object in (5a) is indefinite when the sentence receives a relational reading.

It has been pointed out, by contrast, that it is impossible to get a relational reading when a definite object is involved, as illustrated by the contrast between the examples in (6):

- (6) a. Mary has a husband of her own. (relational reading)
b. Mary has the husband (*of her own). (non-relational reading)
(Kobukata (2004:28))

In (6b), the verb *have* takes the definite noun phrase *the husband* as its object. This sentence, unlike (6a), does not convey the meaning that the husband is Mary's own, since the phrase *of her own*, which makes the reading relational, cannot be used in (6b). At least for English native speakers, the man referred to as *the husband* is married to someone else other than Mary. Unlike the example in (5a), where a relational reading is obtained, there holds, so to speak, no possessive relation between *Mary* and *the husband*. We will call this kind of interpretation a non-relational reading.

Thus, a definite object is incompatible with a relational meaning, while an indefinite object is compatible with it.

The incompatibility of a definite object in possessive sentences with a relational reading is also shown by the following contrast. Observe the sentences in (7):

- (7) a. Sandy has the child on her lap, but she has no child of her own. (non-relational reading)
b. # Sandy has a child, but she has no child. (relational reading)

When a definite object such as *the child* is used as in (7a), a parent-child relationship can be denied in the second conjunct without any contradiction. Thus, the first conjunct in (7a) does not mean that the child is Sandy's own child. By contrast, the first conjunct in (7b), where an indefinite object is involved, typically conveys that *Sandy* and a *child* are in a parent-child relationship. That is, the conjunct receives a relational reading. The second conjunct in (7b) describes that there is no parent-child relationship between them, and is therefore incompatible with the first conjunct. Hence, the contradiction.

To sum up, when *have* takes a relational object, and the sentence receives a relational reading, the definiteness effect arises. An indefinite object is compatible with a relational reading, while a definite object is not.

2.2. Ownership Reading

In the previous subsection, we have observed the examples where a relational noun such as *husband* is used as the object of *have*. In this subsection, we will deal with the possessive constructions in which a non-relational noun is used as the object.

Costa (1976:6) points out that the sentence in (8a) can be paraphrased with the sentence with a verb *own* as in (8b).

- (8) a. Surely someone in this room has a copy of 'The Language of Ronald Ziegler.' (= ownership reading)
- b. Surely someone in this room owns the copy of 'The Language of Ronald Ziegler.'

Incidentally, it is generally assumed that the verb *own* expresses alienable possession as the following contrast shows (cf. Nakau (1998:86)):

- (9) a. They own property all over the world.
- b. * This car owns a very powerful engine.

The possessum such as *property* in (9a) can be expressed by the verb *own*, while a part-whole relation as shown in (9b) cannot be compatible with the verb. Thus, the verb *own* can only express an alienable possessive relation.

Turning to the examples in (8), the subject *someone* alienably possesses the object *a copy of 'The Language of Ronald Ziegler,'* which is assumed to be a non-relational noun phrase. Let us call this reading an "ownership reading." It should be noted here that in the sentence (8a), the object is again indefinite.

The paraphrase relation in question, however, does not hold when definite objects are used. Consider the sentences in (10):

- (10) a. Surely someone in this room has the copy of 'The Language of Ronald Ziegler.' (≠ ownership reading)
- b. Surely someone in this room owns the copy of 'The Language of Ronald

- b. *John-ni-wa ane-ga i-ru.*
 John-DAT-TOP sister-NOM be
 ‘John has a sister.’

Japanese possessive constructions also exhibit the definiteness effect when the sentences express properties attributed to the subject. Firstly, observe the following examples:

- (13) *Taroo-ni-wa kyoodai-ga {a-ru / i-ru}.*
 Taroo-DAT-TOP brother-NOM be
 ‘Taroo has {a brother / brothers}.’

This example indicates that the subject *Taroo* has a sibling relation to the referent(s) of the object *kyoodai* (‘a brother / brothers’). That is, the sentence shows one of the properties attributed to the subject *Taroo*.

When weak determiners such as *takusan-no* (‘many’), *futa-ri-no* (‘two’) and *nan-nin-ka-no* (‘some’) are used as in the example (14a), the sentence is fully acceptable. The sentence in (14b), on the other hand, cannot be accepted because strong determiners such as *sono* (‘the’), *hotondo-no* (‘most’) and *subete-no* (‘all’) and the like are used (cf. Kishimoto (1996, 2000)).⁴

- (14) a. *Taroo-ni-wa {takusan-no / futa-ri-no / nan-nin-ka-no}*
 Taroo-DAT-TOP {many-GEN/two-CI.-GEN/some-CI.-GEN}
kyoodai-ga {a-ru / i-ru}.
 brothers-NOM be
 ‘Taroo has {many / two / some} brothers.’
 b. * *Taroo-ni-wa {sono / hotondo-no / subete-no / kare-no}*
 Taroo-DAT-TOP {the/ most-GEN / all-GEN / he-GEN}
kyoodai-ga {a-ru / i-ru}.
 brothers-NOM be
 ‘Taroo has {that / most / all / his} brother(s).’

What is more, the same effect arises in the context where alienability is expressed, as shown in (15) below, in addition to the context where inalienability such as a sibling relation is expressed, as in (13):

- (15) *John-ni-wa kuruma-ga aru.*
 John-DAT-TOP car-NOM be
 ‘John has a car.’

The example (15) expresses the subject’s property in that John possesses a certain thing, i.e. a car.

The object *kuruma* (‘car’) in (15), which is assumed to be a non-relational noun, can co-occur with determiners like *takusan-no* (‘many’), *nan-dai-ka-no* (‘some’) and *suu-dai-no* (‘a few’) as are illustrated by the following examples in (16a), respectively. In contrast,

determiners such as *hotondo-no* ('most') and *subete-no* ('all') cannot stand as the nominative phrases of possessive verbs. Thus, the definiteness effect also appears in the examples (16b):

- (16) a. *John-ni-wa* {*takusan-no* / *nan-dai-ka-no* / *suu-dai-no*} *kuruma-ga*
 John-DAT-TOP {many-GEN / some-CL-GEN / a few-CL-GEN} car-NOM
aru.
 be
 'John has {many / some / a few} cars.'
- b. * *John-ni-wa* {*hotondo-no* / *subete-no*} *kuruma-ga* *aru.*
 John-DAT-TOP {most-GEN / all-GEN} car-NOM be
 'John has {most / all} cars.'

These examples suggest that Japanese possessive constructions also exhibit the definiteness effect when they express a property of the referent of the subject. In this respect, both Japanese and English possessive constructions are similar to each other.

4. Disappearance of the Definiteness Effect

In contrast to what we have observed in the previous sections, there are examples in which definite objects co-occur with possessive verbs both in English and Japanese. In other words, there are examples which do not display the definiteness effect. In this section, we observe the English and Japanese possessive constructions in which no definiteness effect arises.

4.1. Non-Relational Reading

Although we have so far seen examples in which the definiteness effect arises, there are also ones in which the same effect is not found. Consider the following example:

- (17) Mary has the husband as a dancer but she is still single.
 (non-relational reading)

The English possessive construction in (17) does not necessarily convey Mary's marital state. In other words, the referent of the object of *have*, *the husband*, can refer to some other person's husband.⁵ Thus, the interpretation of the example (17) is as follows:

- (18) There is a contextually salient person who is already a husband of someone and he stood in a dance-partner relationship to Mary.

Unlike a relational reading, which we have already mentioned in section 2, the relation between the subject and object referents in (17) is contextually dependent in that the relation is specified by the *as*-phrase even though the same relational noun *husband* is used as the object in this example. We will call this type of reading a non-relational reading.

There are some other examples where a non-relational noun such as *car* is used. Observe the following sentences:

- (19) a. Mary has the big car.
 b. Mary has the big car, but it doesn't belong to her.

These sentences do not show the definiteness effect. The sentence in (19a) tells us only that Mary is using the big car irrespective of whether or not she owns the car. Thus, the ownership relation between Mary and the car can be negated without any contradiction, as is illustrated in (19b).

The same is true of Japanese possessive constructions like the following:

- (20) a. *John-ni-wa Mary-ga iru.*
 John-DAT-TOP Mary-NOM be
 'John has Mary.'

(Kishimoto (2005:219))

- b. *John-ni-wa ano ojisan-ga iru.*
 John-DAT-TOP that man-NOM be
 'John has that man.'

(Kishimoto (2005:219))

- c. *John-ni-wa ano hon-ga aru.*
 John-DAT-TOP that book-NOM be
 'John has that book.'

The Japanese possessive constructions in (20) can be compatible with the definite nominative phrase. That is, the definiteness effect does not arise here. In these examples, no relational reading is obtained. The sentence in (20b), for example, does not express that the nominative phrase *ano ojisan* ('that man') is John's uncle. Rather, *ano ojisan* ('that man') could be just his helper, and then the sentence (20b) does not mention the nominative phrase as John's relative.

Some possessive constructions in English as well as in Japanese do show the definiteness restriction, while others do not, as we have observed in this section. When the effect does not arise, the interpretation of the sentence is different from the one when the effect is observed. Unlike a relational reading, the possessive constructions cannot express a property attributed to the subject, when no definiteness effect arises.

In what follows, we will observe that the object of possessive verbs can be divided into two types, depending on whether the object referent is treated as new or old information when the definiteness effect does not arise.

4.2. Other Senses of Have

Tham (2004, 2005), who deals with the same kind of possessive constructions with *have* we have dealt with in this paper, argues that the meaning of *have* can be distinguished based on the information structure status of the object. When the objects convey new, focus

information for the addressee, the sense of *have* is assumed to be presentational, while when they carry old, presuppositional information, the sense of the verb reflects a particular sense of possession, namely control.

In the following subsections, we consider how the possessive constructions with focused objects and the constructions with presupposed objects both in English and Japanese are distinguished.

4.2.1. *Focused Objects of Verbs of Possession in English and Japanese*

Let us first look at the following examples, where the possessive sentences allow definite objects:

- (21) Q: Who can help John?
 A: He has Sally.
 (22) A: We need more trimmings for the tree.
 B: The tree has all those lights we got last year.

(Tham (2004:203))

When the sentence in (21A) is uttered in response to the preceding question (21Q), the definite object *Sally* in (21A) conveys new, focus information for the hearer. The conversation exchange in (22) also allows the definite object in (22B) to be introduced newly into the discourse.

It should be noted that the sentences in (21A) and (22B) do not specify a particular possessive relation between the entities of the subject and object; the relation between them is contextually dependent. That is, the examples get a kind of non-relational readings.

The verb *have* in these examples has a presentational function in that the definite objects convey new information. Notice also that the intended meaning of (21A), for example, can also be expressed by a *there*-construction, as shown in (23A) (cf. Rando and Napoli (1978)):

- (23) Q: Who can help John?
 A: Well, there's Sally (, Susan, and John).

The definite phrase in (23A) is licensed by a context such as that given in (23), which involves a preceding question to which the existential construction forms an answer. Thus, the post-verbal NP *Sally* in the existential construction (23A) conveys new information for the hearer. This is a so-called list-reading of existential constructions.

Also in some Japanese possessive constructions, definite objects can be used, conveying new information. Look at the following question-answer pair in (24) and (25):

- (24) Q: *Dare-ga John-wo tetsudau koto-ga dekiru no?*
 who-NOM John-ACC help thing-NOM can Q
 'Who can help John?'

- A: *John-ni-wa* {*Mary / ano ojisan*}-*ga* *i-ru*.
 John-DAT-TOP {*Mary / that man*}-NOM be
 ‘John has {*Mary / that man*}.’
- (25) Q: *Okane-ga* *nai* *kara* *hon-wo* *uritai*
 money-NOM NEG because book-ACC buy+want
noda *ga* *nanika* *ii* *hon* *nai*
 cop although something suitable book NEG
kana.
 Q
 ‘Is there any suitable book to sell, because I don’t have enough money.’
- A: (*kimi-ni-wa*) *Ano* *taikutu-na* *syosetsu-ga* *a-ru*
 (you-DAT-TOP) that boring novel-NOM be
jyanaika
 tag-Q
 ‘You have that boring novel.’

The definite objects *Mary* and *ano ojisan* (‘that man’) in (24A) and the object *ano taikutuna syosetsu* (‘that boring novel’) in (25A) are all newly introduced into the discourse. Just like the sentences in (21A) and (22B), those in (24A) and (25A) do not receive a relational reading. The sentence in (25A), for instance, does not assert that the person who asked the question (25Q) owns the novel even if in fact, the ownership relation does hold between the person and the novel, but rather it expresses a tentative possessive relation between the subject and object referent. That is, the sentence does not express a property of the subject.

Thus, when the objects in possessive constructions are definite, they can convey new information (presentational reading) in both English and Japanese possessive constructions.

4.2.2. Topical Objects of Verbs of Possession in English and Japanese

Let us now observe the possessive constructions where the object of *have* carries old, presuppositional information.

Tham (2004, 2005) argues that the verb *have* in English possessive constructions can encode a sense of control with animate subjects, when definite objects convey old information.

Before going into any further details, look at the dialogue exemplified above in (22) and reproduced here in (26), where the object of *have* conveys new information:

(26) A: We need more trimmings for the tree.

B: The tree has all those lights we got last year.

As we have shown earlier, the context in (26) makes the object of *have* in (26B) new information. It should be noted here that the object in (26B) is compatible with the inanimate subject *the tree*.

The utterance in (27a), on the other hand, sets up a context in which the object in (27b) is old information for the addressee. The subject *the bathroom* of the sentence in (27b) is not animate. The reply (27b), however, is not felicitous.

- (27) a. Where are the mirrors?
- b. # The bathroom has them.
- c. They're in the bathroom.

(Tham (2004:144))

The contrast between (26B) and (27b) suggests that the subject of *have* needs to be animate when the object conveys old information for the addressee. Therefore, when the object of *have* conveys old information, the control sense of *have*, which will also be obtained if the subject in (27b) is replaced by an animate one, seems to be yielded.

There is a second piece of supporting evidence of the idea that the verb *have* in fact has a lexical meaning of (some strong manipulative kind of) control. Consider the following:

- (28) a. Where are the old ladies?
- b. # I have them, but I can't seem to find them.

(Tham (2004:145))

- (29) a. Who's taking which group around?
- b. I have the old ladies, but I can't seem to find them.

(Tham (2004:145))

Suppose that the expressions in both (28) and (29) are uttered in a context in which the members of a tour group are divided up among different tour guides. In (28a), the manager asks the guide where the old ladies are. The guide may reply with the first conjunct without the second conjunct. However, he cannot reply with (28b), where the second conjunct says that he does not stay with the ladies at the time of utterance since he cannot find them. The unacceptability of (28b) suggests that the first conjunct, in which the object of *have* conveys old information, entails that the guide is leading or guiding the ladies at the time of utterance.

The sentence in (29b), on the other hand, can be used without any contradiction. The first conjunct in (29b) contains the definite object, which conveys new information. Even though the existence of the tour group may be familiar to the dialogue participants, the mention of the particular group *the old ladies* in this context should make the element *the old ladies* a focus element for the addressee. Thus, unlike in (28b), the verb *have* in (29b) does not entail the strong meaning of control above mentioned. Rather, it has to do with some weaker responsibility for taking or escorting the old ladies, if it would be there.

So far, we have shown that the verb *have* seems to have a control sense when the object conveys old information.

When (30A) is translated into Japanese, however, its literal translation is unacceptable. Consider the following sentences (30) and (31):

(30) Q: Where is my umbrella?

A: John has it.

(31) Q: *Watashino kasa doko-ni a-ru no*
 my umbrella where be Q
 ‘Where is my umbrella?’

A: * *John-ni (sono kasa-ga) a-ru*
 John-DAT (the umbrella-NOM) be
 ‘John has it.’

(cf. *John-ga sono kasa-wo motte-iru.*)

(cf. *John-no-tokoro-ni sono kasa-ga aru.*)

Unlike the English possessive constructions in (30A), when the object conveys old information, the sentence like (31A) is infelicitous.⁶ The ill-formedness of (31A) suggests that Japanese possessive constructions lack a usage parallel to (30A). In other words, in Japanese possessive constructions the definite object needs to convey new information when the constructions do not display the definiteness effect. In the following possessive constructions in Japanese, for example, the definite object is felicitous only when the element conveys new information:

(32) A: *Ame-ga futte-kita kedo*
 rain-NOM fall-begin-PAST ADV
kasa-wo motte inai noda ga...
 umbrella-ACC have NEG COP ADV
 ‘It’s began to rain, but I don’t have an umbrella with me now...’

B: *(kimi-ni-wa) Mary-no kasa-ga a-ru janaika*
 (you-DAT-TOP) Mary-GEN umbrella-NOM be tag-Q
 ‘You have Mary’s umbrella!’

As is illustrated in (32), the nominative phrase in (32B) is assumed to be new information for the addressee. Specifically, the utterer B in (32) does not seem to be asserting the existence of *Mary-no kasa* (‘Mary’s umbrella’), but rather simply drawing the addressee’s attention to the existence of the umbrella as filling the predication slot like ‘the thing for you to use in such a situation’ as illustrated in (32). Thus, when the definite objects are felicitous, the objects are always presumed to represent new entities in Japanese possessive constructions.

There is another piece of evidence for the incompatibility of the object as old information with those Japanese possessive constructions which do not display the definiteness effect. Observe the pseudo-cleft sentences (34)–(35a) and *wh*-question (35b):

(33) *John-ni-wa Mary-ga i-ru*
 John-DAT-TOP Mary-NOM be
 ‘John has Mary.’

The sentence in (34) is felicitous, which serves to focus the element *Mary*, which appears in object position marked with nominative case *-ga* in (33).

- (34) *John-ni i-ru no-wa Mary (dake) da*
 John-DAT be that-TOP Mary (only) COP
 ‘The only one who can help John is Mary.’

(Kishimoto (2005:228))

Both sentences in (35), on the other hand, are not acceptable. The focused elements in (35) appear in the subject position rather than the object position in (33).

- (35) a. *?*Mary-ga i-ru no wa John da.*
 Mary-NOM be that-TOP John COP
 ‘The one who has Mary is John.’

(Kishimoto (2005:228))

- b. *??Dare-ni Mary-ga i-ru no ?*
 who-DAT Mary-NOM be Q
 ‘Who has Mary?’

(Kishimoto (2005:229))

In the unacceptable example (35a), the dative phrase *John* in (33) is placed at the end of the sentence via pseudo-clefting. In a similar vein, the possessive *i-ru* in (35b) does not permit a nominative phrase to serve as a presupposed element by virtue of a *wh*-question.

The examples we have seen in this section suggest that when Japanese possessive constructions do not show the definiteness effect, the object of the verb must always bear new information in the discourse. This fact leads to a presentational sense of possessive verbs in Japanese. By contrast, it does not have to express new information in English possessive constructions.

There are languages in which the objects are not allowed to bear old information when the definiteness effect does not arise. According to Tham (2004, 2005), an example of such a language is Mandarin. To see this, compare the question-answer pairs in (36) and (37).

- (36) Q: *Sanmao ca shenme dongxi?*
 Sanmao wipe what thing
 ‘What is Sanmao wiping/polishing?’
 A: *Sanmao you na xie jingzi.*
 Sanmao have that some mirror
 ‘Sanmao has those mirrors.’

(Tham (2004:146))

- (37) Q: *na xie jingzi zai nar*
 that PL mirror be at where

ne?

Q-PRT

'Where are those mirrors?'

A: #	<i>Sanmao</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>(na</i>	<i>xie</i>	<i>jingzi).</i>
	Sanmao	have	that	some	mirror

'Sanmao has those mirrors.'

(Tham (2004:146))

Like in Japanese possessive constructions, in (36A), the object, which conveys new information, is easily allowed in the possessive constructions, while the one which conveys old information in (37A) is not.

In sum, unlike in English, the objects in possessive constructions in Japanese as well as in Mandarin cannot bear old information when the constructions do not show the definiteness effect. These facts lead us to conclude that Japanese *a-ru*, *i-ru* and Mandarin *you* ('have') do not have the lexical meaning of control, which is available in English *have*. In other words, it follows that there are two different senses of *have* in combination with definite objects, depending on the informational status of the object.

4.3. Summary

So far, we have demonstrated that while possessive constructions in English have a parallel distribution to possessive constructions in Japanese when the object conveys new information, while they do not, when the object expresses old information.

A comparison between Japanese and English possessive constructions in terms of information structure suggests that English *have* is polysemous in that it can encode several meanings.

Firstly, the verb *have* can express a possessive relation characterizing a property of the subject, when a relational reading as well as an ownership reading is obtained. In these readings, the definiteness effect arises.

Secondly, when the interpretation of a possessive construction is a non-relational reading, where the definiteness effect disappears, the verb *have* seems to easily bear a presentational function of introducing new entities into the discourse. That is, the verb does qualify as informationally light in context, as we have already seen.

Moreover, as we have shown in the previous subsection, there is another sense of *have* licensing only definite objects that convey old information. That is, the sense of *have* is assumed to express a control relation. In this case, its subject has to be animate because of the entailment of the control relation.

In possessive constructions in Japanese as well as in Mandarin, however, the verbs *a-ru*, *i-ru* and *you* ('have') cannot encode the third specific possessive relation, namely a control

relation, which is available only in English possessive constructions.

The observation we have made can be summarized as shown in the following (38) and (39):⁷

- (38) *have* in English :
 - a. relational reading (property attributed to the subject)
 - b. presentational reading
 - c. control reading
- (39) *i-ru, a-ru* in Japanese / *you* in Mandarin :
 - a. relational reading (property attributed to the subject)
 - b. presentational reading
 - c. Φ

It should be noted here that the difference between English and Japanese possessive constructions including Mandarin possessive constructions comes from an observation in terms of information structure.

5. Motivation for the Definiteness Effect

In this section, we will argue that the motivations for exhibiting the definiteness effect in *there*-constructions and possessive constructions both in English and Japanese are not identical.

It is commonly agreed in the literature that the addition of a *there*-construction to a certain context means the introduction of a discourse referent into the domain of the context. This requires the discourse referent to be novel (the referent must express new information for the addressee). That is, *there*-constructions have a presentational function. It is generally anomalous to assert the existence of an entity presumed to be familiar for the addressee. Thus, naturally enough, noun phrases with determiners such as *the*, *every*, *both*, *most*, as well as proper names and pronouns, are excluded from the postverbal positions in *there*-constructions, as in (1b) **There are the candidates for the job*. Even though definite noun phrases felicitously appear in the postverbal position in *there*-constructions, as is observed in so-called *there*-constructions with a list-reading, definite noun phrases do not have to be used anaphorically (cf. Heim (1982), Abbott (1993) and Ward and Birner (1995) among others). In this sense, *there*-constructions with a list-reading as well as ‘normal’ *there*-constructions (with non-list reading) are felicitous as long as the presentational condition that a new discourse referent must be introduced is met. It follows then that the definiteness effect of *there*-constructions is attributed to the presentational function of the constructions.

In possessive constructions both in English and Japanese, on the other hand, there is not such a restriction on the information structure of the objects, when the constructions show the definiteness effect. That is, the objects can convey old information as well as new one. To see this, observe the following examples:

(40) Q: What type of wife does John have?

A: He has a beautiful wife.

(cf. It is a beautiful wife that John has.)

The utterance in (40A), where the object *a beautiful wife* conveys new information, is felicitous response to the question in (40Q).

In addition, the objects in English possessive constructions can express old information. For illustration, consider the following examples:

(41) Q: Who has a {wife / lover}?

A: John has a {wife/lover}.

(cf. It is John who has a wife.)

The question in (41Q) sets up a context in which the subject *John* in the felicitous response (41A) is focused, while the object *a wife* or *a lover* is presupposed.

Thus, the objects of possessive constructions in English can express old as well as new information.

It should be noted that the same explanation can be applied to the objects in Japanese possessive constructions. Observe the following sentences:

- (42) a. *John-ni-wa ototo-ga i-ru*
 John-DAT-TOP brother-NOM be
 ‘John has a brother.’
- b. *John-ni i-ru no wa ototo dake da*
 John-DAT be that-TOP brother only COP
 ‘It is only a brother that John has.’
- c. *Ototo-ga i-ru no wa John da*
 brother-NOM he that-TOP John COP
 ‘It is John who has a brother.’

(Kishimoto (2005:228-229))

As the sentences in (42b) and (42c) illustrate, not only *ototo* (‘brother’) in the object position in (42a) but also *John* in the dative subject position in (42a) can appear in the focus position. Thus, the objects in Japanese possessive constructions also do not have to bear new information; they can also express old information for the addressee, when the constructions exhibit the definiteness effect.

In sum, the definiteness effect of *there*-constructions and possessive constructions of English and Japanese cannot be accounted for from the same perspective. The definiteness effect in *there*-constructions is accounted for in terms of the presentational function. By contrast, the objects of possessive constructions both in English and Japanese do not have to convey new information; the information structure of the objects is underspecified.

6. Conclusion

We have been concerned with the difference as to whether the information structure of the object is specified or not in possessive constructions in English and Japanese when no definiteness effect arises. Generalizing the observation of the difference, we concluded that English *have* is polysemous, while Japanese *i-ru*, *a-ru* cannot express the control relation.

Furthermore, a closer look at the definiteness effect both in existential constructions as well as possessive constructions provides a deeper insight. Despite the fact that the same term ‘definiteness effect’ is used in both constructions, it follows that the phenomenon is different in terms of information structure. Specifically, we have argued that there is a difference in the motivation for the definiteness effect in *there*-constructions and possessive constructions.

NOTES

* I would like to thank Yukio Hirose, Nobuhiro Kaga, Yoshiki Mori, Masaharu Shimada, Toshihiro Tamura, and *TES* reviewers for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper. Needless to say, any remaining inadequacies are my own.

¹ The following abbreviations are used in the glosses of examples in this paper: DAT = dative case marker, NOM = nominative case marker, CL = classifier, GEN = genitive case marker, NEG = negative morpheme, Q = question marker, STAT = stative morpheme, TOP = topic marker, COP = copular verb, HON = honorification morpheme, PAST = past form, ADV = adversative expression, ADJ = adjunct.

² Wechsler (2006) points out that light verb *have* is incompatible with a pronoun *it* as in (i):

- (i) Mary had a yoga class yesterday. # Sam had it too.
(cf. Mary had a yoga class yesterday. Apparently she really enjoyed it.)

Based upon the above contrast, Wechsler claims that sentences such as (i) show the definiteness effect. In this sense, it follows that verbs with ‘dynamic meaning’ including verbs of acquisition and light verb *have* uniformly show the definiteness effect. A more detailed discussion will be provided in the near future.

³ Kishimoto (2000, 2005) provides four different syntactic tests based on subject honorification, reflexivization, controlled PRO, and arbitrary PRO, which are responsible for determining the subjects of the possessive verbs *a-ru* and *i-ru*. For further arguments, see Kishimoto (2000, 2005).

⁴ Incidentally, Hirakawa (2006) observes that a definiteness effect arises in the following sentence in (ib), where a degree noun is used as the object of the verb *a-ru*.

⁵ It should be noted here that the referent of *the husband* in (17) can be the husband of *Mary*. However, this interpretation is provided only by the context. Thus, the sentence (17) does not assert the marital relationship between *Mary* and the referent of *the husband*.

⁶ Instead of using the verb *i-ru* and *a-ru*, to express the control relation that English can express, Japanese uses another verb such as *motte-iru* (‘have’), which requires an accusative phrase as its object:

- (i) *John-ga* (sono kasa-wo) *motte-iru*.
John-NOM (the umbrella-ACC) have-STAT
‘John has {it / the umbrella}.’

Moreover, it is possible to answer the question using an existential construction, as is illustrated below:

- (ii) *John-no ie-ni aru*.
John-GEN house-in be
‘{It / The umbrella} is in John’s house.’

⁷ The notation in (39c) indicates that *i-ru* and *a-ru* in Japanese and *you* in Mandarin does not have control meaning.

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